

ANIMAL COMPANIONSHIP AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION
IN THE MIDDLE ENGLISH *YWAIN AND GAWAIN*

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Abstract

As a relatively recent field within literary cultural studies, “animal studies” has the potential to ask sophisticated new questions about the central and privileged place of the humanist *cogito*. Through an examination of the human-animal companionship found in the Middle English romance *Ywain and Gawain*, this thesis aims to contribute to the project of animal studies by tracing how questions about humanity and animality both construct and deconstruct a subject’s identity. In the poem, Ywain, a knight in Arthur’s court, is exiled from society and befriends a lion, who travels and fights alongside him. The dynamics of their bond highlight a posthumanist identity which begins to articulate itself within Ywain. The fluid nature of the category “man” is further examined through an analysis of Ywain’s sojourn in the woods as a wild man, and the “what is a man” encounter which occurs at the beginning of the poem. Though normative society is reinstated at the end of the text, the study concludes that the added presence of the lion in court undermines humanism’s inherently speciesist imagination and serves as a microcosm of one possible vision of a posthumanist society.

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Introduction

Identity Construction and Significant Otherness

Over the last several decades, much work in literary study has focused on the constructed nature of identity. Such views, in questioning the autonomous *cogito* of humanism, playfully deconstruct their own object. As such, these theories constitute a threat to humanism, which is arguably the prevailing moral and political worldview in the modern West. Humanism, founded on ideas of human progress in liberty and knowledge, privileges humans as more rational, facultied (abled), and crucial to morality and justice than other living things.

But scholars eager to question such beliefs now talk of posthumanism, a worldview informed by the latest advances in the physical sciences (primarily biology) and recent protests put forth by animal rights activists and legal specialists. Cary Wolfe, in his book *What is Posthumanism?* (2009), outlines a posthumanist theoretical model for understanding cultural texts, which relies on current work in systems theory and Jacques Derrida's later writings about animals. Wolfe subordinates ideas of human specialness and instead seeks to realign what we conceptualize as "human" with other species, and eventually to push past our current understanding of "human" altogether.

The value and persuasiveness of Wolfe's assertions lie in their methodological caution: he successfully argues that there are two levels on which one's criticism may be either humanist or posthumanist. One level involves the object of inquiry: are the insights gained from the examination of the object progressing in the direction of posthumanism?

For instance, a critic may examine animal abuse cases and argue for more and better-defined rights for nonhumans. The other level involves the “knowing subject” which is performing the inquiry. If one does not question the humanist worldview used when attempting a posthumanist critique, such humanism is reinforced, regardless of the strength and merits of the argument. Thus, a scholar may argue a pro-animal stance while still basing such an argument firmly (and perhaps unconsciously) on humanist ground—quietly maintaining and even advancing aspects of the pro-human viewpoint they sought to question.

Wolfe’s conception of posthumanism necessarily shares a family resemblance with animal studies, a heavily politically-tinged critical field which has been gaining in prominence in the last two decades. Scholars working in animal studies seek to know animals *qua* animals, and to learn more about the manifold ways humans and animals relate to each other. In doing so, they aim to counter what they see as instances of *anthropocentrism* or *speciesism*, that is, unwarranted or inappropriate importance or favor given to humans.

While animal studies is often placed within the broader category of “cultural studies,” Wolfe maintains that it is really a different beast altogether. He bases this view on the habit cultural studies models have of advancing a philosophical position based on the liberal democratic subject. In order for animal studies to be meaningful, he argues, it must radically rethink the notions of human knowledge and subjectivity which such views rely on.

In this vein, some of the more exciting recent scholarship in animal studies has centered on the notion of companionship. The word “companion” comes from the Latin *com-* and *panis*, lit. “with bread”—a companion is a food-fellow, one you eat with. Because its etymology contains this notion of communion, companionship implies that when you break bread with someone (or something), you are nourishing the relational and spiritual bodies as well as the physical one. A core tenet of the present thesis is that such nourishment is possible not only between humans, but between humans and animals as well.

To support that premise, I turn to Donna Haraway, who, in *The Companion Species Manifesto* (2003), succinctly demonstrates a far-reaching understanding of the value of companionship and relations between living things in our “emergent naturecultures.” Using dogs as her specimen species, Haraway brings her scientific background and broad knowledge of history to bear in painting our relationships with dogs as never predetermined by either party, and never constituted once and for all: the relating is present, active, changeable, and changing, world without end. Through the process of “reaching into each other,” Haraway argues, companion animals (including humans) are continually constituting and reconstituting all nodes in the companionship network. She understands companion species (a larger, more heterogeneous category than “companion animal”) as an entire queer family of organic and technic entities which, through our relating to and with them, can teach us *how* to live in our polyvocal, multispecies naturecultures—because we are living in them whether we want to or not.

An example of this kind of companionship is provided by Derrida. In his essay/talk “The Animal That Therefore I Am,” Derrida describes finding himself standing naked in his bathroom one morning looking down at his cat, who was staring back at him. The experience is a powerful one for Derrida because the gaze of the animal, when confronted head-on, insists by its very presence its own alien subjectivity, coming from an otherness that resides outside the sphere of human meaning-making. Under the gaze of the cat, he clearly perceives the borders which delineate “the human”; in that moment of vulnerability, of nakedness, a vast space opens up in which anything can happen to his identity. This is the value and opportunity that animal companions, as fellow-travelers in the world, through their presences as “significant otherness” (in Haraway’s phrase), present.

Thus Derrida, by dismissing those who have written about animals but have never been *seen by* “the animal,” echoes Wolfe’s outline of dual-layer posthumanism. To be under the gaze of the animal and *respond* (rather than merely react) to that presence is surely a posthumanist action at its core. Therefore, I wish to foreground the possibility of constructing our identities posthumanistly as the major boon animal studies is able to provide to texts and people. It is through questioning the humanist schema of the knowing, separate self, inherently superior to “the other animals,” that we can fruitfully problematize, refocus, and rethink issues of power, ethics, and agency in a multispecies world.

A large part of the scholarly work on animals in medieval studies thus far has

been focused in two directions. One direction examines the allegorical tradition that saw literary animals primarily in terms of their symbolic use-value. The bestiaries that flourished in the Middle Ages constitute the shining example of these sorts of texts. In the bestiaries, dozens or sometimes hundreds of animals (some of them mythical) are described in terms of their appearance and behavior (some of it fantastical to modern ears). The text then usually glosses the animal's behavior in terms of Christian theology and morality, and the animal's literary importance subsequently becomes dependent on that allegorical interpretation. A related body of texts is the morality tale, found in its purest form in English in Robert Henryson's *Morall Fabillis*. Henryson's "fables" follow a form similar to the bestiaries: the tale itself and the *moralitas*, or moral lesson. For instance, in "The Cock and the Jasp," a hungry cockerel is sweeping house when he finds a beautiful jewel. He subsequently casts it away as it has no practical use for him, and instead turns his efforts toward finding the day's meal. Interestingly, the *moralitas*, rather than siding with the cockerel and emphasizing the impermanence of wealth, chides the bird after the narrator glosses the jewel as representing *knowledge*. Texts like these were and are seductive because they turn animal bodies into blank parchment over which to write human meaning and speciesist fantasy; these animals do not exist as animals in themselves but serve as proxies for religious or secular morality. The *moralitas* of "The Cock and the Jasp" is a perfect example because a real cockerel has no use for jewels; if the moral lesson involved the cockerel as an actual entity to any degree, it would support his choice.

Another direction of inquiry into medieval animality, grounded more historically, scrutinizes the zoological texts that appeared in the Middle Ages. Hunting manuals such as Edward, Duke of York's *Master of Game* (1413) and Gaston Phoebus's *Le Livre de la Chasse* (1410) deal with the practical aspects of employing animals in the medieval hunt, and protoveterinary texts, largely dealing with the care and treatment of work animals, were beginning to appear. While these are companionship situations, the critical tradition here has focused on the ways animals were conceptualized at the time, how and if different attitudes toward animals altered the ways they were treated, and the meanings that were attached to (non-literary) animals.

As such, medieval literary texts constitute a productive site for exploring questions about constructed subjectivity within the animal-human companion dynamic. While medieval scholarly inquiry has made great headway in analyzing the ways humans overwrote and overrode animality with their own significations, it has not yet adequately explored the *duplex* conduit of meaning, relating, and signification that flows between animals and humans in companionship situations.

With that in mind, this thesis proposes an understanding of medieval companionship texts as "case studies" in posthumanist identity construction. The companion animal's presence as radical otherness opens a space in which the companion human can interrogate his or her own subjectivity. There is an important difference between this method and other approaches for questioning one's sense of self. By having the "mirror" be an animal, the human "subject" is displaced from the center of a humanist

network of meaning-construction. Being “marginalized” in this way allows for the possibility that an animal can teach us more about ourselves than another human could. And we may just find ourselves shifting our ideological locus closer to a space in which we count animals as more equal co-travelers in our journey through this world.

I have selected the fourteenth-century English romance *Ywain and Gawain* as an illustrative text. Though generally considered an inferior translation and adaptation of Chrétien de Troyes’ *Le Chevalier au Lion*, the retained prominence of the poem’s animal companion, the nameless lion, makes it an ideal text with which to illustrate the ways that identity construction and companionship are intertwined with each other. Because critical history surrounding the lion in *Ywain* has generally focused on either analyzing his symbolic role in the larger pageant of Ywain’s rehabilitation, or tracing the lion’s antecedents in myth and legend, this poem is ideally situated to move the critical question of companionship forward within medieval animal studies.

There is also a secondary reason this poem was selected: via the main argument, I wish to suggest implicitly that *Ywain* is a nascent posthumanist text. If it is not currently considered posthumanist as such, then by the same token neither should it be thought of as humanist. Scholars are coming to see the epoch of humanism as framed between longer eras, namely prehumanist (ending roughly with the Enlightenment) and posthumanist, which we are in the process of entering due to advances in technology and new insights proceeding from biology. Humanism has been around long enough to highlight the relevant aspects and themes always already present in *Ywain*. Pondering the

occurrences of later authors “writing” earlier ones in Borgesian fashion, I maintain that in another century there will be more posthuman elements in the poem than there are now. I view this thesis as preliminary work in anticipation of that time.

The examination of the themes of companionship in *Ywain* takes place in two chapters. In the first chapter, “Ywain’s ‘Leo Fidelis’: Animal Mirror for Posthumanist Reflection,” I examine the nature of the companionship bond that forms between Ywain and the lion, arguing that a fundamental shift in Ywain’s identity and worldview takes place over the course of the poem. By suffering with and loving the lion through their adventures together, Ywain decenters his own anthropocentric sense of self, relocating his identity along the margin of the “abyssal limit of the human,” in Derrida’s phrase (12). The lion does not teach him how to be human; rather, he illuminates Ywain’s own “creatureliness,” his corporeal, new material truth as a terminal body and fellow-experiencer in the world alongside the lion.

The second chapter, “Adventures in Construction: The Giant Herdsman, Wild Men, and Ywain’s Lion Again,” extends and expands the work of the first chapter by examining other instances of identity construction which manifest through less tidy companionship doublings. Colgrevice’s encounter with the Giant Herdsman, a “happening” recounted at the beginning of the poem, provides a startlingly clear example of a robust posthumanist identity in full force, and the reaction such a construct engenders. Then, around the midpoint of the poem, which coincides with the nadir of Ywain’s heroic parabola, Ywain finds himself (or more accurately, does *not* find himself)

living in the wilderness as an archetypal wild man. During this time, his companions are the forest itself and, later, the hermit he encounters. Having lost everything (materially, socially, intellectually), Ywain is broken, and this is what allows a new, posthumanist sense of self to begin to form in him—it is certainly no accident that the lion appears right after Ywain completes his “gestation” in the animal world of the forest. Finally, through a deeper analysis of the companionship between Ywain and the lion, and the commonality of their experiences, I argue that their combined presence in court at the end of the poem constitutes nothing less than a symbolic, microcosmic prototype of one possible vision of a posthumanist society.

By bringing Ywain “into the kennel” to do posthumanist work (as Haraway would say), this thesis aims to satisfy both levels of Wolfe’s framework for successful posthumanist criticism. The question “what is a man?” is the implicit refrain which is obsessively returned to in *Ywain and Gawain*. In analyzing the poem’s answers to this question, I echo the claim that a radical reevaluation of the concept of “man” is needed to effect any real and lasting change in the lives of animals.

Chapter One

Ywain's "Leo Fidelis": Animal Mirror for Posthumanist Reflection

Ywain and Gawain is a strange tale, involving married and marred love, demons and giants, and magic rings. But the strangest aspect is its leading animal. The lion that Ywain encounters, saves, and befriends accompanies him for around half of the poem's 4000 lines. The lion is actually the second most visible character in the story after Ywain himself, spending more time with the protagonist than anyone else, including his wife.

Such prominence begs an analysis of the interactions between Ywain and the lion, as well as their answers to the questions their bond poses. The overall drama of the poem is concerned with the rehabilitation of a fallen knight; as an arrogant man-at-arms in the beginning of the poem, Ywain does not realize the value of life, as evidenced by his eagerness to find the storm-making spring and "one-up" Colgrevice by killing the knight who always appears there. But his rehabilitation is incoherent outside of an understanding of the relationship Ywain forms with the lion. Laurie Frost, in her analysis of contemporary animal-human bonds in literature, is quite right in affirming that learning to care for an animal constitutes a challenge to our own humanity, to what it means to be human (48). Through an analysis of the deepening sense of companionship between Ywain and the lion as the poem progresses, I argue that caring for a nonhuman creature allows Ywain to come to know the gravity of his position as knight, and subsequently manifests the broader identity-foundation required of a good ruler. What makes this poem unique is that that broader sense of self is founded on, and inseparable

from, an identification with the lion, and through it, Ywain emerges with a posthumanist identity.

I wish to circumscribe the following analysis with an awareness of what it means to be feral or domestic. In the Middle Ages, as today, the ways animals were treated often depended on this feral/domestic designation. Such a label is biologically tenuous but, as Frost argues, crucial to society, as it delineates which animals are to be treated indifferently or violently and which are deserving of our protection (47). The boundary falls not only between species but also within them. Wild dogs are those that do not render themselves serviceable to humans, while worker or pet dogs have found a way to be functional or useful in society.

The point made in *Ywain* is that humans must consider this boundary for themselves just as much as they impose it on other animals. Ywain's character arc in the poem can be understood in the same way dogs or horses are trained, since it involves the subordination of individual whim, will, and desire to something "higher." Ywain's trials constitute a domestication and taming process.

This is borne out by the time Ywain spends in the woods as a wild man. Drinking blood and eating roots and raw venison would certainly classify him as a "feral human," but his subsequent juxtaposition with the lion raises questions about what the labels "feral" and "domestic" actually carry with them. The lion, a terrifying creature, nevertheless obeys Ywain's commands and is something of a "civilized animal," being eventually adopted into the courtly scene alongside Ywain. If the lines between feral and

domestic are so nebulous, violation of categories is inherent and inescapable, which of course is what makes Ywain's new identity possible.

The construction of Ywain's new identity begins when he breaks his word to his wife, Alundyne, by absentmindedly continuing to tournament with Gawain past the year-long deadline she and he (Ywain) agreed to. Her servant, Lunette, calls out Ywain in front of the court and reports that Alundyne wants nothing more to do with him. He goes mad and spends several years in the woods, living a bare, "animalistic" existence. When Ywain finally emerges from the forest, his sanity regained, he comes across a lion in distress. The creature has a serpent attached to the end of its tail which is breathing fire. Ywain hacks off the serpent (and the end of the lion's tail) and makes ready to battle the lion, which he assumes will be enraged. But the lion does not attack him:

So wele the lyon of him lete,
 Ful law he lay and likked his fete.
 When Syr Ywayne that sight gan se,
 Of the beste him thoght peté,
 And on his wai forth gan he ride;
 The lyown folowd by hys syde. (2007-12)

Falling down and licking Ywain's feet certainly comes as a surprise to the knight, and mimics typical dog behavior, which Ywain is no doubt familiar with. A bit later in the poem, after the lion mistakenly thinks Ywain is dead, the animal exhibits the same kind of affectionate behavior when he "For fayn . . . liked fote and hand" ("eagerly licked

[Ywain's] hands and feet"; 2086).

At this point, such actions constitute their relationship as one of submission. But other instances of the lion's behavior point their bond in a very different direction. Later on in the story, Ywain and the lion are resting in a castle, and instead of sleeping on the floor, "On Ywains bed his liown lay" (3455). This behavior is canine, but the language connotes something else: marriage. Their companionship is a consummated one—that word being composed of *com-*, "together," and *summa*, "total," implying they complete the missing parts of each other through their relationship.

The emphasis on the lion's tail¹ also extends the "marriage" facet by spilling over into the positively sexual. The hacking-off of the end of the lion's tail constitutes a castrative² act. This action speaks directly to both characters, as it constitutes a basic identity question, one wrapped up with the body. Is a lion still a lion if the iconic puff on the end of his tail is cut off? And the harder question: is a man still a man if his penis is cut off? The text poses its answers in the way the lion acts and the consequences of Ywain's actions, respectively. In both cases, the answer is that the state of the physical body is not of great importance. The lion continues to act like an animal, the only difference being that it is dedicated to Ywain rather than to other lions, and Ywain's identity is bound up in society—knighthood, *cortoisie*, *troth*. The text signs its posthumanist leanings in these answers, foreshadowing the identity Ywain develops later.

¹ Besides the fact that the end of the lion's tail is cut off, cf. for instance how the lion, when told by Ywain to stay out of a battle, "Bitwene his legges . . . layd his tail" (2595), as a dog curls up before resting.

² "Penis," after all, comes from the Latin word for "tail." In English, the use of "tail" in both its anatomical sense and as insinuating the male member derives from at least 1390 ("tail, *n.*").

Directly after saving the lion, however, Ywain has not yet begun to manifest his new identity or to reciprocate the lion's positive feelings. After realizing the lion is not going to attack him, the knight is not overly concerned with the animal's presence. The knight makes his way through the forest and appears to simply tolerate the lion:

The lyoun mekely foloud ay,

And never for wele ne for wa

Wald he part Sir Ywayn fra. (2014-16)

While the phrase “Never for well nor for woe” is formulaic and was chosen at least partly for its rhyme and meter, it sounds strikingly similar to the vows taken between spouses at marriages, extending the metaphoric “marriage” the two of them share.

But it is not until that evening that their relationship really begins. Once Ywain sits down for the night, the lion asks his leave to go hunt, “For his lorde sold him noght greve, / He wald noght go withowten leve” (2023-24). Then the lion, following the scent of a “beste” he has smelled, kills a barren doe; afterward, “Hir throte in twa ful sone he bate / And drank the blode whils it was hate” (“He bit her throat in two and drank the hot blood”; 2029-30). This scene uses the lion to contrast the years Ywain spent in the woods as a wild man with his current state—while Ywain was insane, he lived in the woods and drank the blood of animals he slew, eating the meat raw.

But now, the lion throws the doe on his back and returns to Ywain, who cooks it over a fire. Ywain, when presented with raw animal flesh, performs the expected, normative human action of cooking, but he also has experiential knowledge of how the

other half lives—his body remembers how it was to “live like” an animal. Ywain can now find some of “himself” in the body of the lion.

“Sharing bread” that night starts their companionship. Importantly, the lion waits for Ywain to finish eating his fill of the doe before beginning to eat anything for himself, even though he “hungerd swith sare” (“sorely hungered”; 2018). Ywain notices the lion’s deference and subsequently grows accustomed to the animal’s presence beside him as a constant co-traveler: after setting his head down on his shield to sleep, “Al nyght the lyon about gede / To kepe his mayster and his stede” (2055-56). This establishes a precedent of bodily care which the two companions share from this point onwards—the lion protects Ywain from some of the physical dangers he must face, and Ywain shields the lion from a society which more often than not reacts with fear or violence toward dangerous animals such as lions.

Ywain and the lion spend a fortnight traveling and eating the beasts the lion catches, until Ywain finds himself back at the storm-making spring and chapel where all his troubles began. He nearly goes mad again, but someone within the chapel hears him and asks him who he is; “A man . . . sum tyme I was” (“I was once a man”; 2109) is Ywain’s reply.

This is a profound response, for it shows how far from his normative humanist worldview Ywain has traveled. His response not only mirrors society’s opinion of him—one who cannot keep his word, his *troth*, is not worthy of inclusion in the company of men—but also reflects his new grounding in his experiences of animality. Despite his

physical form, Ywain cannot conceive of himself as a human; he has more in common with his lion, in the sustaining meal that they shared, than he does with the human who asked him who he was.

Ywain's response thus stands as a counterpoint to the Herdsman's answer to the same question—"who are you?"—at the beginning of the poem, which is examined in more detail in the next chapter. As Colgrevice recounts it, the Herdsman effortlessly asserted that he was a man, despite his physical makeup only sharing with humans their upright posture; the rest of his body is described as a composite of different plant and animal parts. This creature calls itself a man, while Ywain denies that he is a man in any meaningful sense.

Neither of them, then, predicates humanity or manhood on physical appearance, since Ywain, as a knight equal in power to Gawain, is nothing if not the ideal physical image of chivalric prowess. Their responses to the same question indicate that humanity is based on something else, and that something else seems to be self-knowledge. The Herdsman has realized that identity is constructed from an irreducible multiplicity of factors, a fact which is borne out in his physical appearance. Ywain is learning the same thing by traveling with the lion; in experiencing his dependence on animal bodies and their mutual interconnectedness, the knight implicitly realizes that what he thought of as "man" is actually a patchwork construct. He thus defines himself negatively, by what he is not: he is "not a man." What he *actually* is he cannot articulate yet.

That knowledge comes after his relationship with the lion progresses to the point

when he has lost his own sense of self within the figure of that animal. They go through many adventures together, defeating demons, evil stewards, and a giant, helping those in need of protection in the process. Ywain's previous identity, which consisted of an ego³ concerned with glory and adventure, disappears; his new ego has now expanded to include others, both human and animal, *within* that "I."

Ywain begins to display this broader identity when he and the lion run into hospitality issues:

Thai said, "Syr, withowten dowl,
That beste byhoves the leve tharout."
He sayd, "Sirs, so have I wyn,
Mi lyoun and I sal noght twyn;
I luf him als wele, I yow hete,
Als my self at ane mete." (2217-22)

The porter that prevents them from entering the castle cannot conceive of a lion entering human territory—both physical and mental, in this case. The walls of the castle serve as the visual demarcation for the physical space which is indisputably under human occupation. Only socially-sanctioned animals are allowed inside.

But it is already too late: the arbitrary inclusion of animals which have practical or emotional use-value to humans (sheep, cows, pigs, hawks) undermines itself, because Ywain is able to claim that he loves his lion as well as himself. The lion is also eminently

³ I use the term "ego" here as indicating one's sense of self, the Latin "I," rather than an inflated sense of self-worth.

practical to the traveling knight. There is no remaining reason, apart from precedent, *not* to let the lion in. The lion is Ywain's "kingdom," which he has learned to protect from the speciesist norms of society as he once protected Alundyne's realm from invading knights.

Ywain's love for the lion is also displayed elsewhere in the poem. At one point, Ywain is again denied entrance because of his animal companion. His stark refusal to part ways with the lion is touching:

And, sirs, ye sal were trow mi sawes;

We er frendes and gude felaws.

He es mine and I am his;

For na tresore I wald him mys. (3793-96)

And, sirs, you may well believe my words; we are friends and good

fellows. He is mine and I am his; I would not leave him for any amount of wealth.

The words Ywain chooses here again suggest a marriage situation, speaking to the depth to which their companionship has reached. The instance of doubling in the third line—the syntactical confusion regarding the two bodies, himself and the lion—also suggests that Ywain can no longer discern where one ends and the other begins. Seeing the lion as part of himself, he also (unsurprisingly) values the animal more than any worldly goods.

The lion, as well, displays behavior which shows he is aware of Ywain's well-being. For instance, during one of their battles,

And that parcaýved his lioun,

That his hevid so hanged down,

He hopid that hys lord was hyrt,

And to the geant sone he styrt.

The scyn and fless bath rafe he down

Fro his hals to hys cropoun. (2463-68)

The lion, perceiving Yvain's head hanging down, thought his lord was hurt, and started at the giant. He tore down both the skin and flesh from his neck to his buttocks.

One assumes a regular lion would only mount such a vicious attack if itself or a member of its pride were being threatened. Here, the lion clearly considers Yvain part of its leonine kinship network. Such fierce loyalty was present earlier in the story when Yvain faints in front of the spring and chapel, and the lion, thinking he is dead, attempts to impale itself on his sword. The lion telegraphs the proper behavior of a knight in foregrounding others before itself.

A last, and striking, instance of identity-blurring comes when Yvain explains, after his lion was hurt, that "By his sare set he noght a stra, / Bot for his lioun was him wa" ("He cared not a straw for his wounds, but was concerned for his lion"; 2655-56). In a moment of crisis, Yvain actually decenters his own sense of self completely, instead housing it entirely in the body of "his" lion. It is the inherent realization of self-in-other which prompts the use of the possessive pronoun here. Yvain finding everything about himself in the lion is the final nail in the coffin of his previous humanist identity.

Something similar occurs in a different medieval romance. At one point in *Bevis of Hampton*, the eponymous knight is forced to make a choice between his horse and his homeland; he chooses the former. In interpreting Bevis's choice, which also results in the abandonment of his pregnant wife, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen argues that "knightly identity depends more on animal bodies than upon mere heterosexual desire or quotidian social structures like family" (61). To give up his horse, Bevis would be forced to perform an act of extreme identity-change. His sense of self, his conception of himself as a knight, resides in his horse, not in family or country—thus it is easier to let go of family and country than his horse.

This is the situation in *Ywain*. Through their journey, the two creatures so thoroughly confuse the distinctions between feral and domestic, human and animal, that the lines must be redrawn, and the text implies that a better place to draw them is along the awareness of self-in-self/self-in-other. Domestic means caring about things beyond your own stomach, your mere survival. Ywain the wild man is not feral because he eats raw meat and drinks blood, but because he is disconnected from interspecies communion. He has no one to share bread with, and his new, posthumanist identity results from locating that someone in the form of a nonhuman. The way that the lion and Ywain interact with each other is important from an animal studies perspective precisely because it mirrors and calls into question our dealings with all animals, humans and nonhumans alike. If Ywain can see himself in the figure of a lion, we too can expand our "egos" to encompass animals.

Chapter Two

Adventures in Construction: The Giant Herdsman, Wild Men, and Ywain's Lion Again

The interactions between the lion and Ywain provide the baseline schematic for the companionship paradigm outlined in the introduction and first chapter. It is primarily through their narrative drama, as traveling companions and posthumanist marriage partners, that the question of constitutive identities in posthumanist worlds finds its focus. However, there are other types of companionship present in the text—members of Haraway's expansive “companion species” family—which also serve as mirrors and open spaces for identity construction. The present analysis expands on the companionship model illustrated in the last chapter by examining three other instances of “companionship” in *Ywain and Gawain*: Colgrevice/Herdsman, Ywain/forest/hermit, and Ywain/lion/court. These strange doublings build momentum within the poem, so that by the end, the court, Ywain's society, has become a site of radical possibility for posthumanist identification despite the apparent triumph and reestablishment of the traditional social order.

Noble society is set up much differently at the *start* of the text, though. *Ywain* opens on Arthur's court in a state of disarray as they feast at Cardiff on Whitsunday. Whitsunday, or Pentecost, comes from the Book of Acts, in which the Holy Spirit descends on the Apostles in the form of flaming tongues; thereafter, they are all able to “speak in tongues,” allowing everyone to understand them. Having *Ywain* start on

Pentecost, which is a “reversal” of Babel, foreshadows Ywain’s later ability to similarly “speak” to the lion; the two are able to communicate where there was no understanding previously.

After eating, Arthur, followed by Guinevere, goes “Into chamber to slepeing” (48). The narrator pointedly notes that the knights were surprised when the king and queen retire, “For thai saw tham never so / On high dayes to chamber go” (51-52). Several knights then sit around guarding the door, and one, Colgrevice, begins telling of a recent adventure that brought him shame. The queen, hearing the tale, comes out of the chamber and sits among the knights, bantering with them.

The impotence of the king and the unseemliness of the queen’s activities, both highly visible to a court attuned to subtlety and insinuation, constitute a small breach through which gleams the possibility of a new world. That world becomes emergent when Colgrevice tells his tale. It is this “happening” which he recounts that fuels the cause-and-effect chain reactions of Ywain’s journey, resulting in a court society at the end of the poem which is fundamentally different in an important way—its conscious identification with the animal world. Colgrevice and the Herdsman, as the text’s early example of “animal companionship,” set a precedent for radical significant otherness that continues throughout the poem.

“I Am a Man”

The scene of companionship between Colgrevice and the Herdsman primarily serves to decenter Colgrevice’s notions of what makes up the concept “man.” The court

in disarray at the beginning serves as a question, and the knight's recounting of this story begins to formulate the answer which Ywain eventually articulates. In this way, Colgrevice telling the tale to everyone else at court constitutes a posthumanist act.

The monstrous appearance of the Herdsman himself is the first anomaly that maps out the relationship between him and Colgrevice:

On a lawnd, the fowlest wight

That ever yit man saw in syght

.

He had eres als ane olyfant

And was wele more than geant.

His face was ful brade and flat;

His nese was cutted als a cat;

His browes war like litel buskes;

And his tethe like bare tuskes. (245-46, 257-62)

On a clearing, the ugliest creature that man ever saw was in sight . . . He had ears like an elephant and was bigger than a giant. His face was broad and flat; his nose was snubbed like a cat; his brows were like little bushes, and his teeth like boar's tusks.

The Herdsman's features are described by references either to the plant or animal kingdoms: elephant, cat, boar, and bush. His body is a patchwork quilt—he is a creature composed quite literally of smaller pieces of other animals. Colgrevice attempts to

categorize what he sees but can only do so by picking and choosing from other categories and throwing them all together into something new; through the very nature of his body, the Herdsman physicalizes the process of identity construction. His “embodiedness” signs an ontology which is inscribed outside the usual perimeters of normative humanist society. As such, his mere *presence* is unsettling because gazing at it forces one to directly interface with a constructedness that is not only alien, but points to the inherently constructed and fragile nature of one’s own subjectivity.

Colgrevice soon finds himself knee-deep in that fragile subjectivity. After describing the Herdsman, he relates what happened next:

When he me sagh, he stode upright.

I frayned him if he wolde fight,

For tharto was I in gude will,

Bot als a beste than stode he still.

I hopid that he no wittes kowth,

No reson forto speke with mowth.

To him I spak ful hardily

And said, “What ertow, belamy?”

He said ogain, “I am a man.”

I said, “Swilk saw I never nane.

What ertow?” alsone said he.

I said, “Swilk als thou here may se.”

I said, "What does thou here allane?"

He said, "I kepe thir bestes ilkane." (271-84)

When he saw me, he stood upright. I asked him if he would fight, for I was in the mood for it, but he stood there still as a beast. I thought that he had no ability to understand, no reason to speak with his mouth. I spoke firmly to him and said, "What are you, fair friend?" He replied, "I am a man." I said, "I never saw such a one.[]" "What are you?" he said instantly. I said, "Such as you may see here." I said, "What do you do here by yourself?"

He said, "I keep each one of these beasts here."

Colgrevice's concerns about the Herdsman's animal body are compounded by the latter's upright posture—despite his body being composed of a mix of different animals, the Herdsman is not quadrupedal. The question that hangs in the air is, "is an animal still an animal if it walks on two legs?" In mirroring Colgrevice's upright position, the Herdsman seems to be answering that question implicitly.

But the fact that the Herdsman speaks at all makes matters worse for Colgrevice, implying not only a similar physical makeup, but a mental one, involving reason, intelligence, and other humanist cornerstones. The Herdsman's self-possessed calm while standing in front of the wary, armed knight constitutes a threat, though not the kind Colgrevice is used to. Rather than engaging in feats of arms, Colgrevice is involved in a battle to reconcile his concept of "man" with those things that he sees making up the Herdsman's being. The Herdsman's "I am a man" is ontologically terrifying because it

drives home the flimsiness of Colgrevice's taxonomic and epistemic certainties—both his own and those of his society. If the Herdsman is made up of various plants and animals mismatched together onto one body, and if this is “a man,” then what meaning does that “man” have at all? Or rather, it has a meaning, and it is staring the knight in the face—like Derrida seeing his cat seeing him.

Colgrevice's confused response to the Herdsman's question of who he is —“Such as you may see here”—is the spoken answer to and equivalent of the Herdsman's grotesque body, though “uttered” with less conviction. Colgrevice's summation of his own existence falls back on what the Herdsman can gaze upon. It suggests the implicit consequences of every choice he has made in his life, the aggregate effects of which have brought him here, as well as the visual significations that his physical being generate to one “in the know.” Being clad in armor, riding a horse, brandishing a lance and sword—these all speak specifically and directly to those who are aware of the conventions, attitudes, and expectations of Colgrevice's society.

However, this response to the question “what are you?” rests on an assumption that society's norms are known to everyone. Colgrevice has never encountered a situation in which simply “being seen” does *not* cause all the knowledge and implications of that sight to come bounding after. By predicating his identity on the visual, and making no specific claim to being a knight (or even human), Colgrevice simply exists to the Herdsman in the present moment, the same way the Herdsman exists to him. They are two marvels marveling at each other. In this way, the Herdsman is really a “herds man.”

He illustrates the impossibility of “herding” the concept of man into discrete “pens”; as a consequence, Colgrevice’s preconceptions are let out of the cage.

The Herdsman’s disparate, category-defying traits aggregate to form a new kind of being, continuously challenging the neat animal/human binary. Though he and Colgrevice do not travel, bond, and grow together like Ywain and the lion, their companionship is still real and functions posthumanistly in being a canvas of possibility for redrawing the lines of the self, using notions of humanity and animality as the paint. Their encounter at the start of the narrative sets the stage for the internal strife that accompanies the radical acts of self-definition and redefinition that Ywain experiences throughout the rest of the story.

Ywain as Wild Man

Ywain begins finding answers to the question “what is a man?” when he continues tournamenting past the deadline he agreed to with his wife, Alundyne. By breaking his word, his *troth*, Ywain proves himself unworthy of continuing a privileged position and identity. He loses his “humanity”—that word being charged with the markers of civilization and position he has previously held. The result is insanity. Eschewing weapons, clothes, and his horse, he flees into the forest:

For wa he wex al wilde and wode.

Unto the wod the way he nome;

No man wist whore he bycome.

About he welk in the forest,

Als it wore a wilde beste. (1650-54)

Ywain literally cannot conceive of himself, a malaise which manifests as madness. He now has nothing left to lose except the brute fact of his bare material existence. No one knows where he went because madness is incoherent to society, based as it is upon a “rational” mind. Thus, the beginning of his journey into posthumanism coincides with his journey into the dark heart of the animal world, where a new identity begins to gestate out of the ruins of the old one. It is slanted acts of companionship, this time with the environment itself and the hermit Ywain encounters, which allow for this.

Ywain’s identity is shattered so completely by his breaking of his *troth* that the only sort of bond he can form is between him and the forest at the basic level of materiality. Being outside of society, clothing makes no sense to or for him, and he is unable to relate to other creatures outside of the demands of his stomach. Roderick Nash, in his study of wilderness, notes that if the flat or rolling meadow is a sign of agriculture, domesticity, and civilization, then the forest edge represents its antithesis, the physical and sociological limits of that civilization. Wooded areas are markers of chaos, of natural law. This view was held by the porter who refused Ywain and the lion entrance to the castle.

Ywain’s flight to a place of ontological indeterminacy is concurrent with his movement away from a normalized human identity to one of uncertainty; he goes to the woods because he has no way of integrating into society, since he is not integrated with himself to any degree. He was mind-less with his wife, and is now literally mindless.

During this time, he is communing with the forest, relearning the basics of existence, unknowingly building a foundation for his later growth.

Tropically, his position is based in the “wild man” tradition/archetype. This figure is common in the folklore and romances of medieval Europe. It is a character which serves as a “comment on civilized man, exposing the underside of those values and ideals to which a given society tries to conform” (Hawkins 383) by living on the extreme edge of society, the penumbral space which is neither human nor inhuman. For various reasons, usually involving either a calling to divine vocation or a sudden madness, a character will go into the forests, far removed from the ordered civilized world from which he or she came, and survive on either a vegetarian diet or raw food, including meat, based on whether their “retreat” is intentional (spiritual) or unintentional (madness) (Sprunger 153). The eponymous hero in *Sir Orfeo* is an example of a romance hero who flees to the woods in madness. The topoi centered on this there-and-back journey—living in the forest, eating raw meat, being naked or covered with long shaggy hair—imply wildness and a slide toward the animal world or the bestial, but at the same time can suggest penance and eventual restoration (Sprunger 145).

Ywain displays most of these traits. Once in the woods, he finds a young man traveling with a bow and arrows, which he promptly steals. Afterward,

Ilka day than at the leste
 Shot he him a wilde beste;
 Fless he wan him ful gude wane,

And of his arows lost he nane.
 Thare he lifed a grete sesowne;
 With rotes amd raw venysowne;
 He drank of the warm blode,
 And that did him mekil gode. (1663-70)

Ywain and the forest are “communicating” through the living things that Ywain consumes. Importantly, his eating of “rotes amd raw venysowne” echoes the plant and animal parts that the Herdsman is made up of, and subsequently the Herdsman’s dappled identity. You are what you eat, and Ywain’s choice of sustenance displays that his spirit is similarly coarse.

And ironically, at this point Ywain is much less of a “man” than the Herdsman is: he cannot even speak that paradoxical “I am a man” that the Herdsman effortlessly asserts. Indeed, it would be inappropriate for Ywain to speak, given that his tongue is what got him into trouble in the first place. The word “vocation” has to do with “vocalizing” one’s interiority; as such, Ywain has nothing to “say for himself,” since he is a shell of his former self. It is the world of the forest, in the form of its speechless animals, which teaches Ywain about living integrally. Once he learns this, he too is able to keep his word and speak rightly, as when, without a second thought, he rejects a lady’s entreaty to marry her and be lord of her castle; Ywain still feels beholden to his wife and that new trajectory interferes with his feelings and responsibilities.

But it takes years in the forest to learn this, and even then, Ywain recovers from

his “insanity” only because other humans help to bring him out of it. One is the lady who covers his naked body in magic ointment, but before that, it is a hermit living in the woods. Like Ywain, a hermit is one who lives outside of society, so they exist on that parallel from the start. When the hermit first sees Ywain, he hides in his house, terrified by the sight of the wild man, but starts leaving bread and water for Ywain out of pity. Afterward,

Everilka day he come ogayne,
 And with him broght he redy boun
 Ilka day new venisowne;
 He laid it at the ermite gate
 And ete and drank and went his gate.

Ever alsone als he was gane,
 The ermyt toke the flesh onane;
 He flogh it and seth it fayre and wele;
 Than had Ywayne at ilka mele

Brede and sothen venysowne. (1692-1701)

Every day he came again, and brought with him new venison; he laid it at the hermit's gate, then and ate, drank, and went his way. And as soon as he was gone, the hermit took the flesh, flayed it, and boiled it well until it was done. Then at every meal Ywain had bread and boiled venison.

The hermit then takes the skins and sells them in town, buying better bread for Ywain.

On one level, Ywain is working back up to interacting with humans through his food consumption: he starts with raw venison and barley-bread with the chaff, then moves up to cooked meat and “better” bread. The food Ywain consumes goes through a refinement process, mirroring the refinement Ywain himself is going through—he is what he eats.

But on another level, he is learning to care for others through the process of caring for animal bodies: he sees the way the hermit transforms the raw into the cooked via fire, and how he transforms skins into bread via money. The implicit presence in his mind of these two symbols of human agency—fire and money—prepares him for receiving the help of the maiden who finally brings him back to sanity with her ointment.

The rest of Ywain’s rehabilitation, and the construction of his new identity, involves learning for himself how to actually *care* for bodies (both human and animal). Jeffrey Jerome Cohen is quite correct in perceiving that for Chrétien’s Yvain, “the self-regulation that produces the proper chivalric subject is synonymous with maintaining a whole series of intersubjective relationships,” including the opponents he faces, his wife, and of course the lion (62). It is the same in the English poem. The posthuman relationships (again, human and animal) which Ywain cultivates are what his identity becomes.

“Le Lion au Chevalier”

To illustrate this ever-present construction, it is necessary to return to when Ywain first encounters the lion. After Ywain regains his sanity and performs his first act as new knight—saving the castle of the maiden who had revived him from madness—he saves

the lion from the serpent. He then prepares himself, expecting to be attacked,

Bot the lyoun wald noght fyght.

Grete fawnyng made he to the knyght.

Down on the grund he set him oft,

His fortherfete he held oloft,

And thanked the knyght als he kowth,

Al if he myght noght speke with mowth. (2001-06)

But the lion would not fight. He fawned greatly on the knight, placed himself down on the ground, held aloft his forefeet and thanked the knight as he could, even though he was unable to speak with his mouth.

The lion is feeling gratitude and is expressing it physically, not verbally. Ywain is intelligent enough to employ his visual literacy to understand this sign-language, since he no doubt recognizes such behavior not only from the ways animals like dogs can act, but also from the world of the court. Ywain is duly familiar with kneeling and raising his hands in signs of deference, respect, fidelity, and reverence to both Arthur and God.

This moment also establishes the tenor of their relationship. As illustrated previously, theirs is a marriage in which Ywain looks after and cares for the lion, and the lion remains loyal to and protective of Ywain. As their companionship begins to take shape, so does Ywain's new identity: due to the experiences he has traveling with the lion, his defining trait becomes service to others (human and nonhuman alike). As was illustrated in the first chapter, what is significant, and germane to posthumanism, is that

he learns this by caring for an animal's well-being instead of a human's.

The way Ywain and the lion are concerned about the other's bodily health, like a "marriage," is illuminated most prominently by the battles they fight together. When Ywain is about to fight the evil steward and his two accomplices, they ask him to restrain his lion (2571-73), and only after they insist does Ywain comply and tell the lion to stay back: "He bad his lyoun go to rest. . . Bitwene his legges he layd his tail / And so biheld to the batayl" (2592-96). Again the lion displays doglike subservient behavior, but his obedience is short-lived. As soon as the lion sees Ywain in danger, he jumps at the attacker (the steward) and

with his pawm al rafe he downe

Bath hauberk and his actoune

And al the fless down til his kne,

So that men myght his guttes se . . . (2615-18)

With his paws he tore down both mail and jerkin and all the flesh down to
his knees, so that men could see his guts . . .

When he makes ready to assault the remaining two foes, Ywain "Als with wordes did his main / Forto chastis hys lyowne" (2624-25). Ywain's and the lion's understanding of the situation differs. Ywain is following the rules of combat (and getting the lion's share of the glory) by fighting the three by himself. His is a broader understanding, which accounts for requests, rules, fame, and honor. The lion only understands his link with Ywain; thus, for the lion, it is natural that the endangerment of Ywain's physical being

overrides the order previously given (even though that order came from Ywain!). The lion prioritizes life and the body, while Ywain here is concerned about things of the mind. Indeed, he interprets Ywain's protestations as positive: the lion "thought, how so he sayd, / That with his help he was wele payd" ("By his speech, the lion thought that he [Ywain] was greatly satisfied by his [the lion's] help"; 2627-28). The lion is bent on protecting Ywain; the natural conclusion in the lion's mind to "I protected Ywain" is "Ywain is happy." As such, the lion only ceases his attack when he is beaten away by the two remaining foes.

In this situation, the lion is implied as moving through stages of awareness and deliberation regarding what happens to Ywain. It is, in fact, eminently reasonable: the lion sees the evidence in front of him (Ywain jumping around and yelling) and comes to a conclusion based on his own current actions and his understanding of their relationship. This reasoning is reflected in the word "thought," here startlingly attributed to an animal: "the liown thoght." Ywain and the lion have been confirmed as sharing a commonality not just in their bodies, but in their minds as well—they share thinking.

It is actually Ywain who is at fault for not making understanding possible here. By bringing in rules outside of their "marriage," he breaches the boundaries and appropriate actions which exist between them as mutually-understood conditions. Consequently, the lion's expectations regarding Ywain become unclear, since Ywain has not included him in the new framework.

Ywain's heart is in the right place, though; his reaction to the lion becoming

wounded after attacking his foes shows where his feelings really lie. Whereas before he was concerned with battle odds and rules of engagement,

When that he saw hys lyoun blede,
 He ferd for wa als he wald wede,
 And fast he strake than in that stoure,
 Might thare none his dintes doure. (2631-34)

When he saw his lion bleeding, he was afraid his woe would make him go mad; he struck to the quick in the battle, and none could endure his strength.

Ironically, Ywain seeing the lion in danger causes him to react in the very same way he was just chastising the lion for. The knight seeing red and going berserk proves that both he and the lion are attuned in their perception of their companionship: the safety of the other takes priority.

Their shared physicality and ability to think makes this possible. Simply by existing in the same world and having evolved alongside other beings, there are certain baseline materialistic commonalities that corporeal existences share: hunger, sex, fear, predation, protection, and so on. Every creature's common participation in the experience of material existence is what enables Ywain's posthumanism.

This posthumanism is reflected in Ywain's "name" as he travels along doing good deeds in the second half of the poem: the knight with the lion. Ywain's name and identity are known to none during his travels, reflecting the new identity that is taking shape. He

is only identifiable through reference to his companion animal; he is literally *no one*—he is two.

Ywain's anonymity allows him to add his present, selfless actions to this burgeoning identity, until it is strong enough to endure and accept the shame and wrongdoing of his past. Far from being a personal retreat into pensiveness or fear, the chivalric incognito "is a public act, one of definition and redefinition that speaks to onlookers" (Crane 67). It is *because* of Ywain's desire to reunite with his wife and regain his status in society that he paradoxically hides his face. Because of the juxtaposition of his desire to be reintegrated into society, and the fact that his incognito identity is linked with his constant animal companion, the question becomes, "apart from others, who is Ywain?"

The answer the text gives is that others are what "make him up"—they are what constitutes him and creates him, moment to moment. During the long "incognito" arc of the poem, therefore, Ywain inhabits a liminal world between "human" and "animal," and grounded in neither. His identity is bound up in the lion even as he goes around performing the proper acts expected of an upstanding knight. He does not remain between worlds, however; the posthumanist identity which emerges at the end of the poem *integrates* the human and animal into a new "world."

At the end of the poem, Ywain and Gawain, each championing a sister who has petitioned Arthur to settle a land inheritance dispute, fight to a standstill, and Ywain is subsequently reunited with Arthur and Alundyne. Afterward, his lion becomes a fixture at

his side at court:

Thus the Knyght with the Liown

Es turned now to Syr Ywayn

And has his lordship al ogayn;

And so Sir Ywain and his wive

In joy and blis thai led thaire live.

So did Lunet and the liown

Until that ded haves dreven tham down. (4020-26)

Despite the fact that normative society is reinstated—Ywain regains his wife, name, title, and kingdom—the lion’s presence has indelibly marked the court. The sight, the brute fact, of Ywain and the lion sitting next to each other in their castle is on par with the Herdsman’s “I am a man.” Here, at the end of the poem, the invisible bond between Ywain and the lion ideologically mirrors the physicality of the Herdsman’s amalgamated body found in the beginning.

The mutual creatureliness, their shared physicality and vulnerability, is echoed by the narrator in the final line before the closing blessing, “Until that ded haves dreven tham down.” By focusing on the utter finality of mortal life, after having syntactically juxtaposed Ywain, the lion, Alundyne, and Lunette, the line points to the common ground that exists between companion species sharing the same “naturecultures”—not only death but all the shared sufferings and joys that physical embodiment brings.

The court, by accepting the presence of the lion, inches toward the posthuman.

Ywain's identity has been redefined to include this animal as an integral part of his being; as Ywain is part of the court, the ground on which the court is realized moves accordingly. Making room for companion species in this way, posthumanism can continue to ask and refine questions about humanity and animality, ushering in a worldview which does not relegate nonhumans to the footnotes of morality.

Conclusion

The Animals We Study

The project of this thesis was to show how a medieval companionship text could serve as a model for posthumanist relationship through new constructions of subjectivity. I now wish to offer some inferences and suggestions based on the conclusions reached in the previous chapters to help drive the couplings of animal studies and medieval studies forward in the future.

First, the time period in which *Ywain and Gawain* takes place is technically prehumanist. This serves to throw into relief the humanist and posthumanist facets lurking within. The society through which Ywain moves anticipates humanism by one or two centuries, and as such the familiar elements of the modern subject are visible. However, through an examination of the companionship networks at play in the poem, the text *deconstructs* its own humanist elements in favor of posthumanist ones. As such, it should properly be considered as belonging to the posthuman project.

Second, if the companionship model presented in *Ywain and Gawain* is to be taken seriously as a step toward a deeper understanding of the forces that drive identity construction in a changing world, and not just thought of as an intellectual exercise, it must be applicable to the real world along the lines of the framework Donna Haraway traces for interacting with our manifold companion species. Based on the behavior exhibited by the lion and Ywain in the poem, their relationship can be glossed in terms of real-world dealings, such as those between people and dogs. The ways the lion expresses

affection and gratitude, by licking, kneeling, raising a paw, etc., are instantly recognizable to dog owners, and humans themselves display approximately the same behaviors when feeling similar emotions. Haraway argues of real-world canines that “Dogs are about the inescapable, contradictory story of relationships—co-constitutive relationships in which none of the partners pre-exist the relating, and the relating is never done once and for all” (12). In light of this, it is clear that there exists real-world corollaries to the companionships presented in *Ywain*.

But dogs do not get all the glory. The “sameness” evident between Ywain and the lion, and people and dogs, can even be extended to actual lions in captivity and the trained animal handlers they interact with. In this case, the handlers are fluent in the language of interspecies behavior, and thus are in accordance with the lions in terms of expectations and anticipated reactions. This is exactly the kind of language Ywain must learn when he and the lion “un-sync” during battles, when communication fails them.

The relationships between these two real-world examples are by no means monolithic in nature, nor is the “master-dog” paradigm the only way in which different species can interact peaceably and for mutual benefit. Haraway does include restrictions on what can be included within the term “companion animal”—for instance, such an animal must make the leap to “biosociality,” that is, enter into relationship with human society to some degree. One also generally does not eat, or get eaten by, their companion animal (14).

This still leaves a wide range of possibilities open, then and now. Derrida’s

example of the feline gaze looks not just to the present and future, but also glances backward in time to see Ywain seeing an animal more clearly than his own self. There are as many ways of relating to horses, dogs, and cats as there are creatures to “consummate” those relationships.

Third, the medieval period was a useful time frame for this project because it casts into relief the fact that the problems associated with species-otherness have been around a long time. It is always sobering to consider the evolution and devolution of an issue over long stretches of time. This helps orient a textual reader by paradoxically *decentering* him or her from their own humanist worldview in realizing that these questions will not go away even if the world were to become posthuman tomorrow. More perspective cannot hurt, and examining a prehumanist society emerging as a humanist one can provide insight into our current transition from humanist to posthumanist.

Finally, in determining how this study has contributed to current scholarship, I would like to return to Cary Wolfe and his dual-layered outline for posthuman criticism. As he succinctly notes in his essay “Human, All Too Human,” “As long as [literature] leaves unquestioned the humanist schema of the knowing subject who undertakes . . . a reading, then it sustains the very humanism and anthropocentrism that animal studies sets out to question” (569). At the outset of this study I mentioned that the argument intended to satisfy both levels, that is, advance a posthuman argument from a posthuman stance, by questioning the foundations on which Ywain’s identity rests. There has been no claim herein to extend humanist rights to animals, for such a claim is nonsensical. Not only are

different animals distinctly different creatures (even within one species), requiring different questions in order to parse more appropriate ways of treating them, but not even all *humans* agree that humanism is an appropriate view to base identities on; if all countries came together and agreed on a Cartesian model as the basis for human subjectivity, this would be a different argument with different aims. The irreducibly complex nature of entities—minds and bodies—demands a more nuanced approach.

There has also been no claim that nonhumans can or should live up to a sense of self which was developed by certain humans. Humanism can perhaps provide adequate answers to some of our questions, but the runaway speed at which our worlds are moving requires a broader and deeper understanding, based on technological and scientific advances, insights from animal studies, and practices from philosophic and naturalistic eco-studies.

Since medieval texts can serve so readily in Wolfe's two-level system, they provide a useful body of knowledge with which to interrogate different conceptions of that creature called "man." *Ywain and Gawain* is one example of such a text, since it ripens in accordance with the gathering speed and power of the emergent posthumanist epoch.

But the poem also points to further areas in which to search for answers to the questions of companionship. This study primarily examined the bonds between mobile lifeforms, usually friendly but occasionally neutral, that are displayed in the poem. Future analyses could illuminate the ways that *hostile* relations work similarly or otherwise in

creating the senses of self outlined in the chapters. Alternately, scholars could deploy theoretical frameworks from eco-studies in elucidating the mechanisms by which holistic environments influence the elements within them. That is, is it even coherent to speak of companionship between two creatures without an examination of their surrounding environment first—especially when the environments, themselves, may be similarly constructed? Finally, psychoanalysts could examine Ywain’s madness and determine if there is a kind of companionship going on between two different versions of himself, and from there, how society could more effectively treat (in both senses of the word) the “mentally unwell.”

I would like to end by inscribing the future of posthumanism within a reading of Haraway. In “A Cyborg Manifesto” (1985), she seeks to redeploy issues involving feminism, jurisprudence, and technoscientific development in terms of a hybrid creature grounded in, and born of, those same realities—a constructed creature which has no need to rely on the patriarchal, hegemonic, and inadequate narratives of the past. In *The Companion Species Manifesto*, Haraway reimagines cyborgs as “junior siblings” in the larger companion species family (11). Transhumanism, a philosophy which binds humanist fantasy to technological promise, can be viewed in a similar way.

Transhumanism cannot adequately respond to the issues it seeks to resolve because it relies on a (humanist) definition of man that it subsequently makes incoherent. If technology to eliminate aging becomes available, and this technology is applied, what are the immortal subjects that are produced? Certainly not humans. If transhumanism has a

place, it is primarily as a stepping-stone to posthumanism, which aims to reengage ontological questions about the “human” being—treating the disease instead of the symptom, as it were.

Work in this direction proceeds apace. Indeed, in *The Order of Things*, Foucault famously suggests that, as the foundations of modern thought continue to be eroded by challenges to the autonomous *cogito*, we may well see “man” (a concept of recent provenance) vanish, like a “face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea” (387). The image of water washing away human projection onto the world is a fine one, being not only accurate—time continuously challenges our notions of ourselves—but also implying the agency that seeing, and seen, animals possess.

There is, of course, much work yet to be done in this field. The “death of the human” has been prophesied for some time, but practice is lagging behind theory. Significant hurdles to the ideological and practical emancipation of animals exist, not least among them the serious counterarguments put forth by scholars and theorists, some of whom are in favor of animal studies and animal rights, and some of whom are not.

Nevertheless, Haraway speaks of the multidirectional flow of genes and values as being an essential feature of life on earth (9). This idea can be used to redeploy *homo sapiens sapiens* in a theoretical world that accounts for both species difference and resemblance. This is, in fact, the ultimate aim of animal studies: to get to the point where it is no longer necessary to question the idea of “man,” because to do so would be to dismantle a concept that has already become obsolete, incoherent, unintelligible. By

following Ywain into the kennel, we can see how such ideas are already well at work within our own lives.

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